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# ***MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES***

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**TITLE:** The Falaise Pocket. World War II Allied Encirclement of the German Armies.  
Failure or Success of the Allied Leadership and Planning?

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** The Falaise Pocket. World War II Allied Encirclement of the German Armies. Failure or Success of the Allied Leadership and Planning?

**Author:** Major Braden DeLauder, United States Air Force

**Thesis:** The failure of the Allied forces to close the Falaise Gap was the result of lack of communication directly linked to the type of personalities of the commanders.

**Discussion:** By August 1944, the Allies had broken out of the Normandy beachhead and were rapidly exploiting a breakthrough in the German lines. In early August, Hitler ordered a heavy single pronged attack to the west toward Avranches to cut off the US forces to the south. With the 'Ultra' intelligence, Bradley recognized this as an opportunity to encircle the German Army in France. By turning Patton's Third Army, in the south, north towards Argentan, Bradley formed the lower jaw of a pincer movement while Montgomery ordered Crerar's First Canadian Army south to push towards Falaise to form the upper jaw. Connecting the Allied armies between Falaise and Argentan would completely surround the German army. The encirclement of the German forces would be known as the Falaise pocket.

To the north, Montgomery's forces struggled to push south against the German defensive line. Patton's Third Army, in concert with the XIX Tactical Air Command, was making extremely rapid progress. Late on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, Bradley stopped Patton's forces from moving north of Argentan. The decision to stop Third Army's movement north allowed many German personnel to escape from the Falaise pocket.

I will analyze the leadership decisions, command relationships, and what I think to be a lack of communication between the Allied leaders. Why did Montgomery, who was commander of the Allied ground forces in France, not close the pincer from the south? Why did Bradley stop forces at Argentan? Why didn't Eisenhower get involved?

**Conclusions:** The Allied leadership failed to capitalize or exploit the mistake made by Hitler driving the *German Army* westward. By not closing the pocket's gap at Falaise, the Allied forces lost an opportunity to destroy a large percentage of the enemy in France. The major factor for this failure was conflicting commander personalities.

Commander personalities can overcome any obstacle. With the right personality, a poorly organized command structure results in inefficiency that can bog down an operation. While this can be a major hurdle when leading large organizations to push towards a single objective, commander personalities can unite armies to form effective teams towards achieving a common objective. Commander personalities can overcome inefficiencies in a command structure. Additionally, a commander's personality must demand open communication lines up and down the chain of command. Subordinates must feel the ability to state their case without suffering the backlash of presenting a dissenting opinion. All these traits are even more important when dealing with coalitions due to the fact that national pride can become a large hurdle.

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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## Preface

By August 1944, the Allies had broken out of the Normandy beachhead and were rapidly exploiting a breakthrough in the German lines with the highly mobile US Army on the right flank. The Allied Supreme Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower had made General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery the Field Commander for the ground forces for Operation OVERLORD but had still not moved his headquarters to France. Montgomery's Twenty-first Army Group included ground forces composed of Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley's First US Army and Lieutenant General Miles C. Dempsey's Second British Army. On 23 July, Montgomery's group added General Henry D. G. Crerar's First Canadian Army. On 1 August, Eisenhower activated the Twelfth US Army Group making Lt Gen Omar Bradley the commander. Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges took over command of the US First Army while Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr. took command of the newly activated US Third Army. The reorganization gave Bradley an army group comparable in forces to Montgomery. But Montgomery remained as Field Commander of the Allied ground forces in France as well as remaining commander of the Twenty-first Army Group. This made for an unusual command structure especially since Eisenhower would soon be in France to take the role of Allied ground commander, making Montgomery and Bradley peers, each with an army group.

In early August, Adolph Hitler gave the order for the German Generals to start a heavy single pronged attack to the west toward Avranches to cut off the US forces to the south, followed by an attack against the northern Allied forces to push them off the continent. Hitler surmised this would cut the US troops' logistical train allowing the Germans to crush the cutoff forces to the south. With the 'Ultra' intelligence, Bradley recognized this as an opportunity to encircle a large percentage of the German Army in France. By turning Patton's Third Army, in

the south, north towards Argentan, Bradley formed the lower jaw of a pincer movement while Montgomery ordered Crerar's First Canadian Army south to push towards Falaise to form the upper jaw. Connecting the Allied armies between Falaise and Argentan would completely surround and finish the majority of the German army in France. The encirclement of the German forces would be known as the Falaise pocket.

To the north, Montgomery's forces struggled to push south against the German defensive line. Patton's Third Army, in concert with the XIX Tactical Air Command (TAC), was making extremely rapid progress chewing up the French landscape. Late on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, Bradley stopped Patton's forces from moving north of Argentan. The decision to stop Third Army's movement north allowed many German personnel to escape from the Falaise pocket. Many of these personnel were the commanders and staff holding key positions in leading the war effort. Later in 1944, with the German armies and leadership from the Falaise pocket reconstituted, the Battle of the Bulge proved that the Allies had not totally destroyed the German army. Many historians have argued this extremely controversial issue of not closing the pocket earlier.

I will analyze the leadership decisions, command relationships, and what I think to be a lack of communication between the Allied leaders. Why did Montgomery, who was commander of the Allied ground forces in France, not close the pincer from the south? Why did Bradley stop Patton's forces at Argentan with the forces to the north struggling for every inch of ground? Why did Eisenhower remain in the background as a hands off leader; or did he?

Finally, I will place a special focus on the use of air power during the campaign. Did the Allied commanders take advantage of the air superiority that existed? Why was the 'bomb line' removed from the Falaise pocket during escape?

*“If a soldier would command an army he must be prepared to withstand those who would criticize the manner in which he leads the army.”* (Bradley, A Soldiers Story, p. xi)

## The General Situation

In a continuing effort to ‘close the ring’ the Allies strike at Normandy would be the first step towards attacking the Germans on their homeland. Normandy was the foothold for the Allies in an attempt to strike at the Ruhr, the industrialized part of Germany, and shut down the Nazi war machine for good.

SHAEF, (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces), under Supreme Commander of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, had successfully landed forces at Normandy. The two key ground force commanders included General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, Commander of the British forces, and Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, Commander of the U.S. forces. Eisenhower had also selected Montgomery to hold the position of Field Commander for the land forces until Eisenhower was able to move his headquarters to Europe.

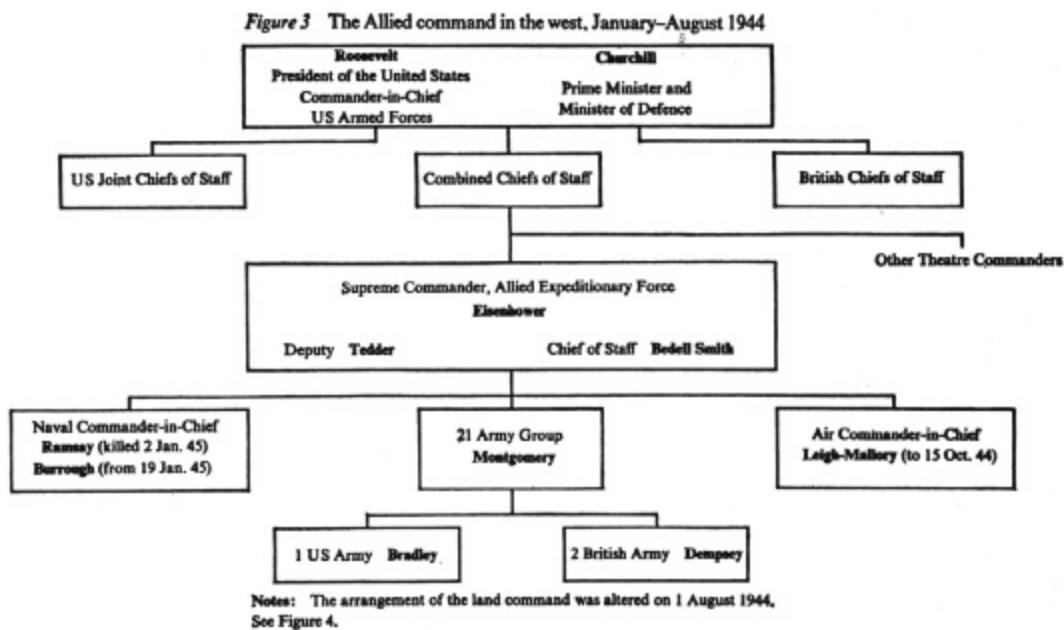
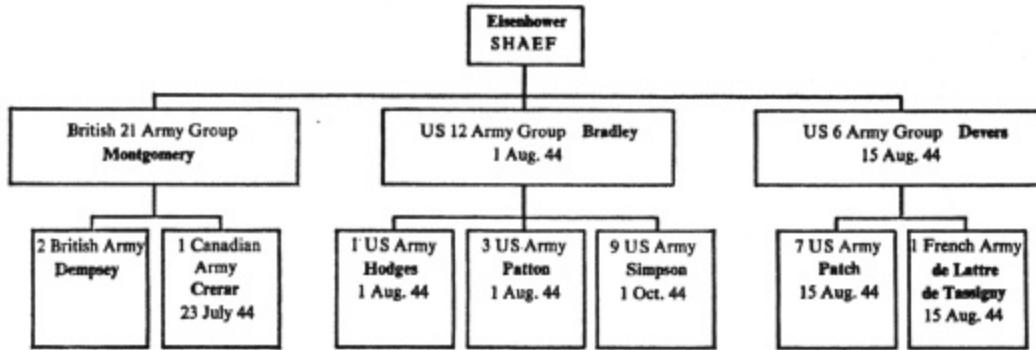


Figure 4 The Allied land command as finally developed



Notes: Dates are those on which each formation became operational. 6 US Army Group came under Eisenhower's command on 15 September 1944. Montgomery continued to direct all land operations during August 1944. Eisenhower took active personal command on 1 September. During the Ardennes offensive 1 and 9 US Armies were placed under 21 Army Group from 20 December; 1 Army reverted to 12 Army Group on 18 January and 9 Army on 4 April.

Each general had very different personality traits to bring to the fight. Eisenhower was a hands-off general who seemed comfortable leading at the strategic level. Martin Blumenson said he “never had...an intuitive feel for the battle” and “refrained from meddling.” “He visited his subordinates, listened to them, [but] never interfered.”<sup>1</sup> Bradley viewed Eisenhower as “a political general of rare and valuable gifts, but as his African record clearly demonstrates, he did not know how to manage a battlefield.”<sup>2</sup> Field Marshal Alan Brooke, the British Chief of Staff, wrote in his diary, “[Eisenhower] can maintain the best of relations between British and Americans, but it is equally clear that Ike knows nothing about strategy and is *quite* unsuited to the post of Supreme Commander as far as running the strategy of war is concerned!”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Martin Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals. The Untold Story of the Falaise Pocket—The Campaign that should have won World War II, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, A General's Life, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Viscount Alanbrooke, War Diaries: 1939-1945, Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 575. Field Marshall Alan Brooke was later known as Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke.

Eisenhower wrote that Montgomery was “a very able, dynamic” leader that needed “a strong immediate commander.”<sup>4</sup> John English wrote, “Even his critics have readily acknowledged his extraordinary organizational brilliance and outstanding professional skill in the management of battle. In the pure tactical realm he had few equals.”<sup>5</sup> But cautiousness was another well-known trait of Montgomery’s. Bradley’s view in A Soldier’s Story noted similar personality strengths of Montgomery but also carefully identified his lack to quickly exploit successes and the requirement for “tidy” operations.<sup>6</sup> Bradley’s views, 33 years later, were not as politically correct. In A General’s Life Montgomery’s “character and temperament” were described as “flamboyant, eccentric, strident, difficult, demanding and—in a GI term of the time—a glory hound.”<sup>7</sup>

Blumenson and Eisenhower described Bradley as a “well balanced senior officer” who was respected by both the Americans and the British. “His judgments [were] always sound”<sup>8</sup> and “he preferred to take no chances.”<sup>9</sup>

The main objective of Operation OVERLORD was for the Allied forces to get a firm foothold on the continent. A secondary objective for the British forces was to take Caen on D-Day. Caen was identified as key to northern France with its road and train structure. Caen’s roads also served as an easy access to Paris and would cut off precious supplies to the German armies in northern France. Once Caen was in the hands of the Allies, the Cotentin peninsula would be cut off, therefore strangling the Germans holding the peninsula, providing the Allies

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<sup>4</sup> Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower, The Eisenhower Diaries, Robert H. Ferrell, ed., (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1981), p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> John A. English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign. A Study of Failure in the High Command, (New York: Praeger, 1991), p. 125.

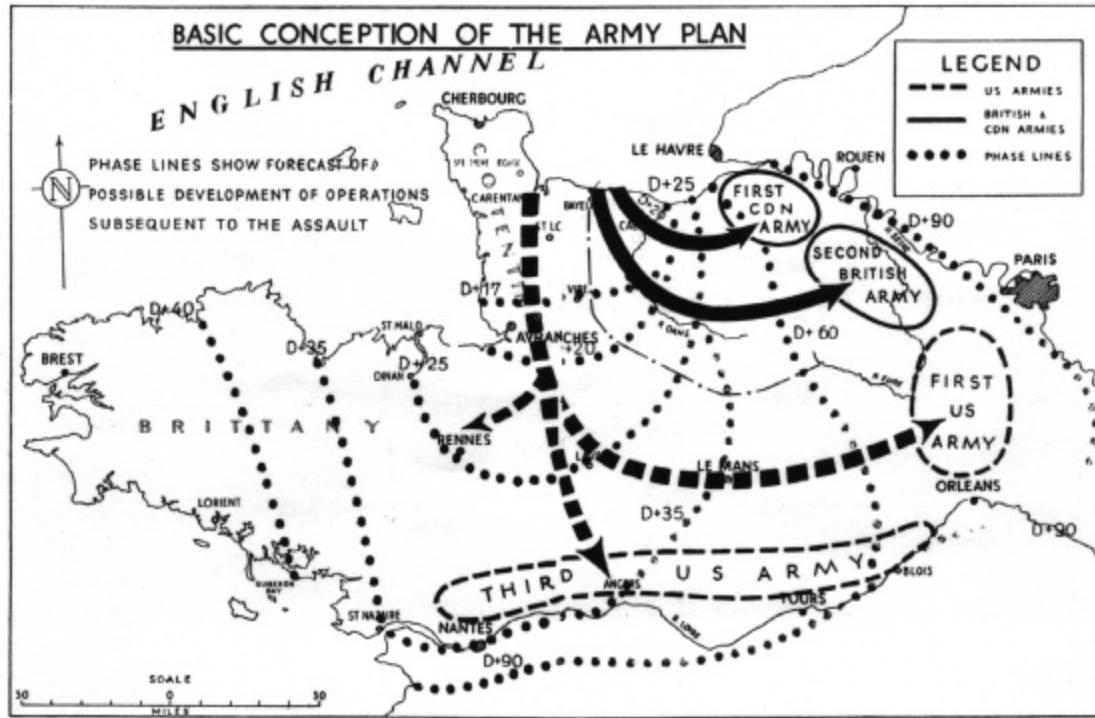
<sup>6</sup> Omar N. Bradley, A Soldier’s Story, (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1951), p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General’s Life, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Eisenhower, The Eisenhower Diaries, p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 27.

with the port of Cherbourg. Additionally, the flat terrain surrounding Caen would provide the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces with airfields crucial to the campaign in France.<sup>10</sup>

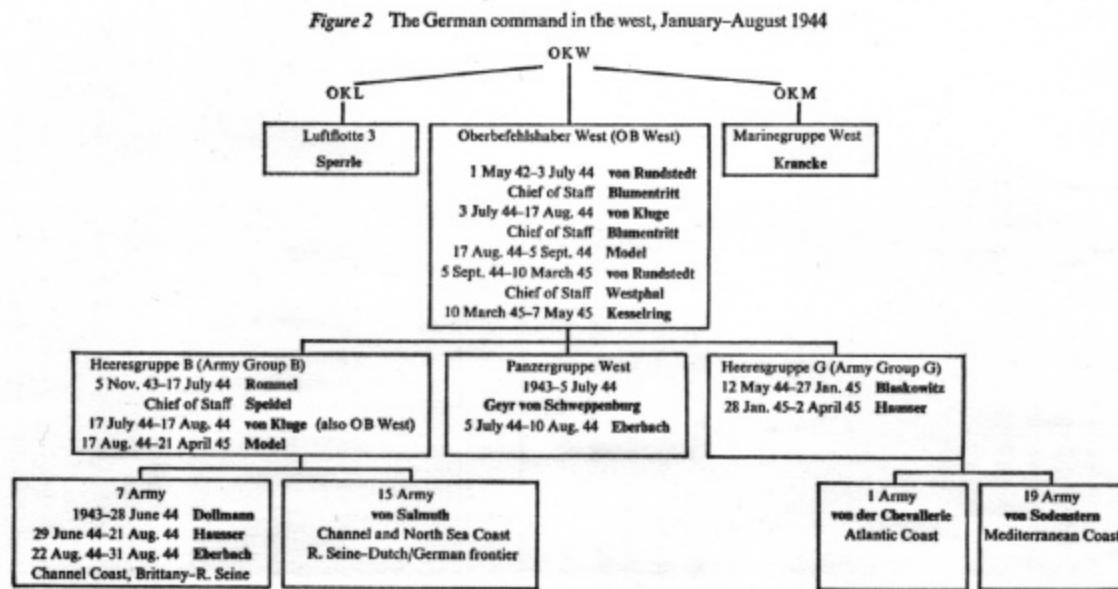


In order to prepare for the landing in Normandy, the Allies made plans to attack the enemy's operational center of gravity. Knowing that they would only land with 6 divisions, they needed to isolate the strategic reserve force during the invasion. France contained 58 German divisions during the invasion. Therefore, the ability to stop the Germans from moving troops forward to the beachhead was critical to Allied success. Making the best use of air superiority, the Allies attacked the critical vulnerabilities. Some of these critical vulnerabilities were the routes and methods of moving the reserves. Allied airpower prepared the battlegrounds by using heavy bombers to target industrial centers, fuel, bridges, road junctions and railway structures in an attempt to cut off the capability of the leadership to resupply and transport the reserve forces to the entrenched beachheads. The organized targeting of the key components necessary to

<sup>10</sup> Carlo D'Este, Decision in Normandy, (London: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 222-3.

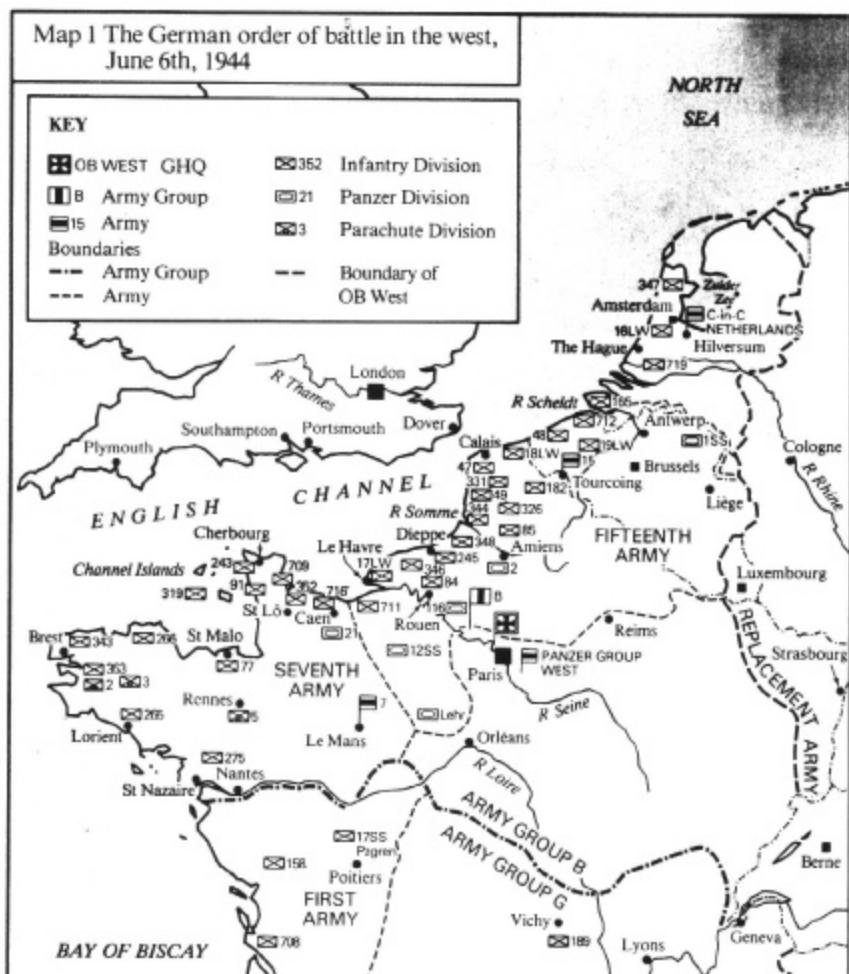
isolate of the Normandy beachhead from the enemy reserves was known as the Transportation Plan.<sup>11</sup> Air power also provided a means of destroying large troop movements during the invasion. And, at a minimum, the aircraft could harass the German forces and slow the ability to respond to the invasion force.

One advantage the Allies hoped to utilize for their plan was the command structure of the enemy. German command structure was intentionally fragmented to keep Hitler in supreme command. The tight command structure did not allow the German Generals to take the initiative and required them to call back to the headquarters for instructions when the attack started. This would prove to be disastrous for the Germans' ability to keep the Allies from attaining a foothold on the European continent. Additionally, two key leaders, including Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, Commander of German Army Group B, were absent during the initial invasions due to the belief that the Allies would not launch an invasion with the poor weather conditions.



<sup>11</sup> Russel F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 58-9.

The German plan to deal with an invasion on the continent was the manipulation of strategic army reserve forces as well as maintaining strong fortified entrenchments to repel any invasion back into the sea.



The German command structure made the decision process required to move the reserves extremely difficult. This would become a major factor in the effectiveness achieved by the Allied invasion. The Allies used Operation FORTITUDE to deceive the Germans into believing that the main Allied thrust would be at Calais, the shortest distance to Europe across the British channel. This deception plan was far more effective than the Allies expected, and, not only

served to surprise the Germans enough to allow the Allies a foothold onto the continent, but also continued to hold the strategic reserves in place many days after the invasion.

The planned secondary objective for the British force proved to be too optimistic and Caen was not taken. Some historians believe that Montgomery's forces allowed the opportunity to take Caen slip away after the landing. Weinberg suggests "the reluctance of Montgomery and his subordinate army commanders to accept heavy casualties" caused the advance to come "to an early halt."<sup>12</sup> When the British finally moved inland, some six to ten hours later, the Germans had already moved two panzer divisions up to foil the attempt to take Caen. The Germans had the two divisions ready to move earlier in the morning but were denied any movement by the friction of the command structure setup by Hitler. Additionally, Hitler's belief that the main attack would be at Calais, prevented any sooner movement of the reserves.

The "reluctance" of Montgomery to "accept heavy casualties"<sup>13</sup> probably was based on the information that he had been receiving from his superiors. The United Kingdom was running out of able men to serve in the military and this was becoming a political strain and a military one too. In the summer of 1944 Montgomery was actually informed that he could be supplied with British troops for about two more weeks of fighting.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Montgomery had seen the heavy toll from World War I and had no desire to repeat it.

### **Air Superiority for the Invasion**

Another of the Allies objectives was to eliminate the *Luftwaffe*. The allies knew that controlling the air would not only protect the landing force from air assaults, but it would make the maneuvering of Hitler's reserves, attempting to fortify the beachheads, next to impossible under constant air attack, as stated previously. Air superiority was achieved prior to the invasion

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<sup>12</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 689.

<sup>13</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, p. 689.

and from D-Day to the end of June the Allied Air Forces had well out matched the German sorties. During that time period, the Allied Air Force launched over 67,000 offensive sorties and 37,000 defensive sorties. The *Luftwaffe* only launched a scant 13,000 sorties. The overwhelming airpower not only provided an umbrella for the Allied forces to land supplies on the beaches uncontested by enemy air, it limited the German forces supply lines and replacement of troops. It was not only airpower causing the Germans problems during D-Day. Naval bombardment proved to be very effective as well on the German armies. Discussing the invasion, on 10 June 1944, Rommel wrote, “Due to the enemy’s air superiority, it proved impossible to bring 1<sup>st</sup> S.S. Panzer Corps, 7<sup>th</sup> Nebelwerfer Brigade, the A.A. Corps and the Corps “Meindl” up to the Orne and Vire fast enough to enable them to counter-attack the enemy forces after the landing.”<sup>15</sup> Additionally he wrote, “Our operations in Normandy are tremendously hampered, and in some places even rendered impossible, by”<sup>16</sup> the enemy air force, the heavy naval guns, the logistics, and the airborne troops. Using air power, naval bombardment, and the airborne troops, Allied plans to isolate the enemy reserves from the beachhead proved to be extremely effective during Operation OVERLORD. On 17 July, “Rommel was severely wounded and rendered *hors de combat* by Allied low-flying aircraft near Livarot.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Intro of Pete Quesada**

On one occasion, after an attack from a *Luftwaffe* fighter on the US army, Bradley questioned Major General Elwood R. ‘Pete’ Quesada, the Ninth Tactical Air Commander, on the failure of protection from the air forces. Quesada’s results of a short investigation quickly resolved the matter for the US Army commander. Bradley quickly recognized the advantage of

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<sup>14</sup> D’Este, *Decision in Normandy*, p. 249-250, 252, 257-9.

<sup>15</sup> B.H Liddell-Hart, ed., *The Rommel Papers*, (Translated by Paul Findlay), (Reprinted Edition 15), (New York: Da Capo Press, 1953), p. 476.

<sup>16</sup> Liddell-Hart, ed., *The Rommel Papers*, p. 476.

air superiority when Quesada, provided him “with two sets of photographs of the battlefield.

One showed the area behind the German lines, with its empty roads and utter absence of movement. The other showed the Allied zone, crawling with nose-to-tail armour and transport convoys, uncamouflaged dumps in the fields, shipping unloading off the beaches.”<sup>18</sup>

It was in North Africa when Eisenhower had recognized Pete Quesada’s “willingness to adjust the command arrangements to the needs of the battle.” Quesada, one of a few airmen to go to great lengths to keep in touch with the ground battle, also “worked hard to keep the ground commanders up to date with the air situation.” Establishing his own headquarters alongside Bradley, “it was Quesada who mounted aircraft radios in American tanks at the time of Cobra.” This equipment allowed Forward Air Controllers to coordinate with the fighters and direct their firepower against enemy strongholds or any other obstacle. This effort in combined arms of air and ground forces received much praise. Max Hastings suggests that “not until Normandy did the army air force become a real participant in the ground battle.”<sup>19</sup> Quesada’s appreciation of the significance of supporting the front lines proved to be extremely important to the push through France.

After the war “Eisenhower asked Bradley to rank the thirty most important American generals of the campaign.” He placed Quesada fourth ahead of Patton who was sixth and J. Lawton Collins, who was seventh. He was placed well above any other air force commanders. Eisenhower too recognized Quesada describing him as a “dashing, cooperative leader.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Liddell-Hart, ed., The Rommel Papers, p. 486.

<sup>18</sup> Max Hastings, Overlord D-Day and the Battle for Normandy, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> Hastings, Overlord D-Day and the Battle for Normandy, p. 271-3.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Alexander Hughes, Over Lord: General Pete Quesada and the Triumph of Tactical Air Power in World War II, (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 302-3.

## Operation COBRA

By July SHAEF and the political powers of the Allied forces were concerned about the lack of movement inland and discussions began on how the troops might begin to get the armies moving and out of their seemingly ‘stalled’ situation. Additionally, the constant movement of supplies across the channel was piling up behind the Allied lines. By 16 July 1944 “more than 450,000 troops [were] ashore including 15 combat divisions of which four [were] armored.” Additionally, the “service elements” to handle the massed units were also at “great strength.” A breakout was needed to provide more room to “maneuver” and for a “greater build up”<sup>21</sup> of the logistics that would be required to support the Allied forces on the continent.

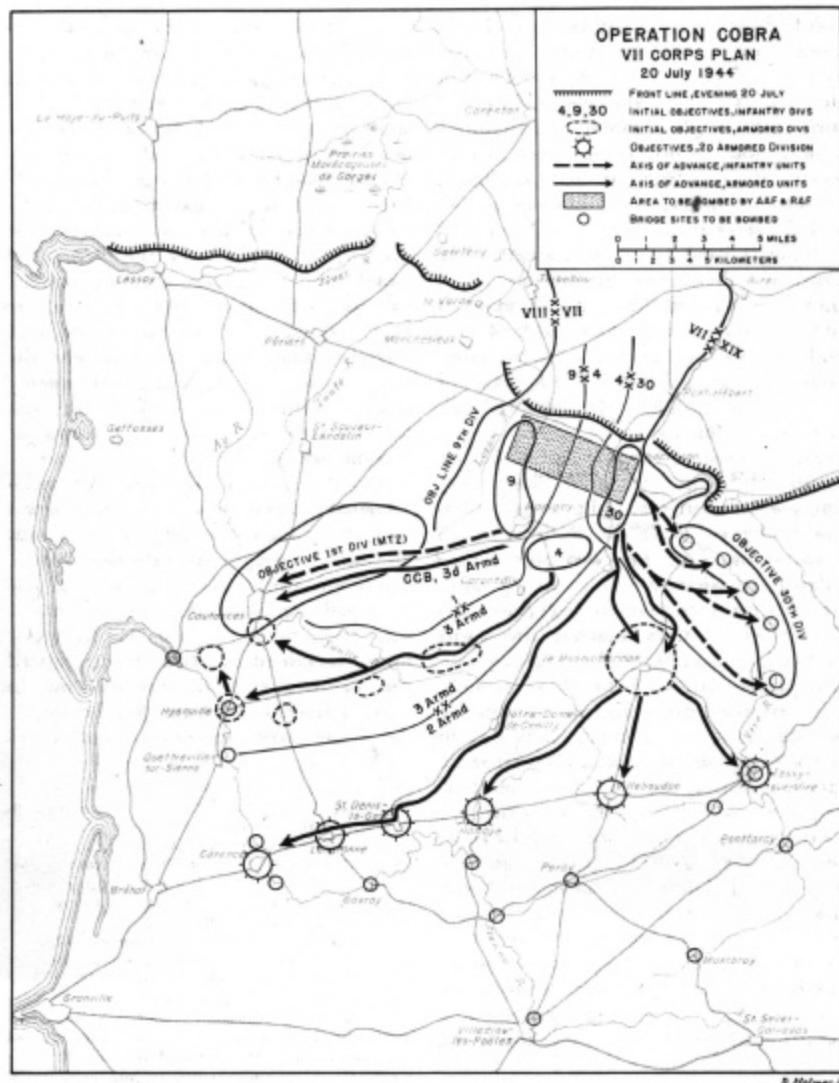
Attrition had become a problem for the Germans. The German lines were growing too thin to hold the Allied forces in place for much longer. When the German generals identified that to Hitler, it fell on deaf ears. Hitler refused to allow the front lines to give ground for better defensive positions. Recognizing the difficulties of fighting a well dug-in enemy army as well as with the problems involved with hedgerow fighting, the Allies decided again to take advantage of having air superiority. Using a concentration of coordinated air power and ground fires, the Allies next step would be to attack the enemy’s vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities were the Germans lack of operational reserves and depth of defenses. General Bradley knew that the easiest way to deliver a massive force of weapons to destroy or uproot the enemy forces was the combination of artillery and aircraft.

Bradley proposed using heavy bombers as an operational solution to a tactical problem. His plan would create a gap in the German lines large enough to exploit with the VII Corps, allowing the Allied forces to take advantage of their mobility, flowing out of their small foothold

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<sup>21</sup> Chester Hansen Diary, 16 July 1944, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA. (Hereafter cited as Hansen Diary, USMHI)

on the continent. After the breakout, the forces would clear Brittany, then fan out throughout northern France towards Germany. Clearing Brittany would make the French ports available for Allied use. These French ports on the western seaboard would provide a location for the supplies entering the theatre from the United States to the U.S. troops on the western flank. "By 11 July General Bradley had conceived the idea; two days later the idea became the First Army's plan. It was called COBRA."<sup>22</sup>



<sup>22</sup> Martin Blumenson, United States Army In World War II The European Theater of Operations: Breakout and

The idea of using heavy bombers to destroy the Germans was not a new one.

Montgomery had attempted the same thing on “7 July in his attack against Caen”<sup>23</sup> but the size of the bomb craters and the length of time between the last bomb and the start of the attack had been rather long. This allowed the Germans time to send the tactical reserves required to defend the area. Additionally, the size of the craters made it difficult for any kind of organized offensive armor attack.<sup>24</sup>

Operation COBRA was divided into three distinct phases. “Phase one was to include an intense serial bombardment by fighter-bomber, medium and heavy bombers of an area approximately 2500 yards deep and 6000 yards wide.”<sup>25</sup> The exact area to be bombed would be identified when the enemy’s position was determined. Heavy artillery fire would also be used in the same area. The 9<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> divisions<sup>26</sup> of the VII Corps would then penetrate the enemy position and then “fan outwards” to block the flanks of the breakout.

“In Phase Two, the exploitation of the breakthrough was to be affected by moving two Armored Divisions and one motorized infantry Division through the gap down the two main routes uncovered.”<sup>27</sup>

“Phase Three was called the Consolidation Phase in the plan.”<sup>28</sup> This phase was to insure the V, VIII, and the XIX Corps kept the pressure on and exploited “every advantage gained from

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Pursuit. (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 1989), p. 187.

<sup>23</sup> Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, p. 187.

<sup>24</sup> Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, p. 187-8.

<sup>25</sup> Modern Military Branch, National Archives Records Administration, Washington D.C. *The Operational Records of the First U.S. Army*. Record Group 94, Box 2017. US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” First Army After Action Report, p. 30. (Hereafter cited as NARA, RG 94 Box 2017.)

<sup>26</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> division was added later after intelligence information identified a build up of enemy strength in the planned breakthrough area.

<sup>27</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 30.

[the enemy's] state of disorganization.”<sup>29</sup> Phase three also pointed out the requirement for the coordination of the artillery with the air bombardment plan.

On 19 July Bradley and the air representatives met to discuss the air plan for Operation COBRA. After considerable lengthy discussion about the size of the bombs causing large craters, the conference ended with the issue still not settled. More important was the discussion of the distance of the friendly troops in relation to the impact area and the attack direction. The line dividing the enemy and the Allied forces was the ‘easy’ to see road running from Periers and St. Lo. Bradley reasoned that the aircraft “could fly parallel to it without danger of mistaking [the] front line.”<sup>30</sup> The air representatives argued for a perpendicular attack, thereby reducing the time the bombers would be over the frontlines, making them less vulnerable and able to concentrate on the attack instead of enemy fire. Additionally, the air representatives suggested that the target area be at least 3000 yards away from friendly forces.

Bradley, concerned that this was too far to take advantage of the bombing, initially suggested 800 yards. After much talk, it was agreed the troops would withdraw to be at least 1250 yards away while the heavy bombers would target an area 1500 yards away in order to insure a more reasonable safety margin. “Contrary to Bradley’s and Quesada’s belief, the air force officers at the meeting were unable to fulfill Bradley’s expectations.” In a memo for the record, the air representatives documented that Bradley “was aware of the possibility of gross errors causing casualties [among the troops on the ground],” and that Bradley was fully aware and willing “to accept such casualties no matter which way the planes approached.”<sup>31</sup> “Allied Expeditionary Air Forces headquarters issued an order that day and left the “routings and

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<sup>29</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Bradley, A Soldier’s Story, p. 330.

<sup>31</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 135-6.

altitudes" to be worked out and coordinated by the participating commands.<sup>32</sup> Clearly a communication problem existed between the two groups that wouldn't be identified until later.

On 21 July, the original date for the attack, Operation COBRA was cancelled due to bad weather. The weather continued to be a problem until 25 July when Operation COBRA was kicked off. But on 24 July, due to the changing weather, and a late decision by Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force, COBRA was cancelled only several hours prior to the attack. Only the medium bombers were cancelled on the ground while all the other aircraft for the attack had already taken off. Between the poor weather conditions and the radio message to recall the aircraft, about 300 bombers didn't get the information and attempted to drop on the target. Unfortunately, due to a combination of mechanical and crew error, some of the bombers dropped their bombs 2000 yards short of the road "killing 25 men and wounding 131."<sup>33</sup>

"Bradley was upset and angry over the casualties among his soldiers, but when he learned how the aircraft had approached—over their heads—he became livid with rage."<sup>34</sup> Quesada immediately called back to the air planners only to find that that was the planned attack direction. Realizing that the weather might not support actions in forty-eight hours, Bradley pondered his several considerations. First, to change the attack direction would take several days to replan. Second, he was concerned he had lost the tactical surprise allowing the Germans time to fortify the lines and positioning reserves to counter COBRA's plan. Third, Bradley reasoned that during the delay, many more friendly casualties would result from daily enemy artillery fires

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<sup>32</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 136.

<sup>33</sup> Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, p. 229.

<sup>34</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 185.

than the most recent case of fratricide. Finally, after contemplating the choices, Bradley decided to launch Operation COBRA the next day.<sup>35</sup>

On 25 July, despite the weather requiring the bombers to lower the altitude of the attack and, therefore, change the spacing between the aircraft, Operation COBRA was started. But problems again arose with the aircraft finding their target area. The wind conditions caused the dust and smoke, kicked up by the fighter's attacks, to sit over the friendly forces. This made it extremely difficult for the heavy bombers to find their target area. The consequence of the dust and smoke gradually moving north caused each bomber to individually bomb shorter than the bomber before it. This was known as 'creepback.' The results were approximately 1500 heavy bombers dropped short bombs causing 111 deaths and wounding 490<sup>36</sup> including the death of Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair.<sup>37</sup> After finding out about the attack, Eisenhower stated that would be the last time he would give a "green light" to using heavy bombers for a tactical use.<sup>38</sup>

Following the problems of COBRA's air results, only two infantry units were delayed by one hour before commencing the attack. The initial Allied response to the plan was that it was a failure since "the Germans seemed strong and effective"<sup>39</sup> and the surviving enemy were quick to react to the Allied attack. But the Allied forces were hesitant to push quickly forward due to the fact that for the last couple of weeks the pacing of the hedgerow fighting had been much slower. Some of the men of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division had anticipated they would "walk unharmed

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<sup>35</sup> Hansen Diary, 25 July, 1944, USMHI.

<sup>36</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 139.

<sup>37</sup> War Diary of William Sylvan, p. 37-8, USMHI.

<sup>38</sup> Hansen Diary, 25 July 1944, USMHI.

<sup>39</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 144.

through the bombed area.” Later the judgment changed reporting that the enemies “defense installations, communications, and supplies [were] badly disrupted.”<sup>40</sup>

On 26 July, in order to further the effort of the breakthrough, Bradley assigned all the air support available to assist the penetration of the main attack made by the U.S. VII Corps. Major General J. Lawton Collins, Commander of the U.S. VII Corps, taking a gamble, decided to change the plan and had his infantry clear the roads to commit two of his three mobile divisions. This decision proved to be key in the exploitation of the situation that had developed but had not yet been recognized. “By late afternoon of 26 July, General Collins no longer doubted that his forces had achieved a clear penetration of the enemy defenses. Deeming that the situation demanded speed rather than caution, he told the infantry divisions to continue their attacks through the night.”<sup>41</sup>

To the enemy, Operation COBRA was an extremely effective plan. Lt General Fritz Bayerlein, General of the German forces opposite Operation COBRA, wrote on 25 July “there followed one of the heaviest blows delivered by the Allied air forces in a tactical role during the whole war.” “Back and forth the bomb carpets were laid, artillery positions were wiped out, tanks overturned and buried, infantry positions were flattened and all roads and tracks were destroyed. By midday the entire area resembled a moon landscape, with bomb craters touching rim to rim, and there was no longer any hope of getting out any of our weapons. All signal communications had been cut and no command was possible. The shock effect on the troops was indescribable.” “Resistance was offered by the few surviving detachments of my division,

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<sup>40</sup> Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., The Army Air Force in World War II Europe. Vol III: Argument to V-E Day January 1944 to May 1945. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 237.

<sup>41</sup> Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, p. 250.

but most of these groups were wiped out by the tactical air support rolling forward in the front of the attack.”<sup>42</sup>

On 27 July, “the enemy withdrew along the entire VIII Corps front, leaving extensive road and personnel mines, blown bridges, and numerous booby traps. The advance was made against some enemy mortar and artillery fire, but little small arms fire.”<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the First Army was enthusiastic to have reported to have widened the breach in the enemy lines.

By 28 July, Bradley was no longer concerned with advancing to capture Coutances, the original objective of the penetration thrust. The rapid movement from the breakout had put Avranches well within his reach. The rapid progress allowed a change in the original plan. Now the First Army would take advantage of its momentum and drive south down the west side of the coast instead of “holding and mopping up” the drive towards the west coast. With the exploitation well under way, the First Army was reporting about the highlights of the day. “Our air force, artillery, and tanks destroyed 66 enemy tanks, 204 vehicles, and 11 artillery guns, and damaged 56 tanks and 55 vehicles.”<sup>44</sup>

On 25 July, 29 German divisions opposed Operation COBRA. 33 additional divisions were located through the rest of France. “During the course of the first seven days of Operation “COBRA”, the First US Army had smashed LXXXIV Corps so completely that for subsequent operations it had to be reconstituted with three new divisions. II Para Corps was destroyed”<sup>45</sup> completely. Additionally, Operation COBRA resulted in the capture of approximately 20,000 enemy troops.

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<sup>42</sup> Liddell-Hart, ed., The Rommel Papers, p. 489-490.

<sup>43</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 34-5.

<sup>45</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 38.

COBRA air planning was definitely one key learning point. Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory was the commander under Eisenhower who had been in charge of all Allied air forces. Bradley and Leigh-Mallory were the two key commanders during the planning and coordination of the ground and air assets. During the planning, Leigh-Mallory had left early for another meeting or appointment. When the coordination discussion had finished, Bradley and Quesada were content that all the key components and information had been understood. The next day Leigh-Mallory sent Bradley a note confirming that he was pleased with the results of the meeting and that everything had been approved. Leigh-Mallory's note proved to be misleading since he was not present at the end of the meeting. This resulted in several unresolved issues not being finalized. First, the attack direction was not clear to both the air and ground representatives. Second, the constraints on the intervals between the separate bomber formations also continued to be misunderstood. Furthermore, with Quesada sure that everything had been appropriately coordinated, he did not follow up on the planning of the missions. The COBRA coordination meeting became a major learning point for the Allies confirming that unresolved issues must be addressed and each party's issues must be understood.

### **Clearing of Brittany**

“At noon, 1 August 1944 the fifteen [Allied] divisions then engaged were divided into two armies and the Twelfth Army Group became operational. Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges assumed command of the First Army”<sup>46</sup> and Lieutenant General George S. Patton stood up the Third Army.

With the breakout turning into a rapid exploitation “the long range planners studied the German disintegration in Cotentin [and] noted the conditions mentioned in the preinvasion plans. The Germans indeed seemed to be on the verge of collapse or withdrawal from France. In this

case, Brittany had lost its importance.” The plan had recommended a single corps with a an armored division and three infantry divisions that would take a month to take Brittany, while all the rest of the forces would push east to attack the German forces west of the Seine. Eisenhower, Bradley, and Montgomery took this plan of action and “two armored divisions, the task force, and the infantry division... [totaling] more than 50,000 men” were split off the force “to take the territory in accordance with the Overlord planning.”<sup>47</sup> Blumenson argues that a smaller group acting as a blocking force would have allowed more forces to serve in the offensive push east.<sup>48</sup> But Bradley’s thought process proves to be more complete. In A General’s Life, Bradley lists two reasons for attaining the ports in Brittany. First, he was concerned about the logistics that were flowing into France. A large percentage of supplies were still entering France through Omaha and Utah beach even with Cherbourg open. Second, the weather conditions continued to threaten the existence of the beaches as enter points. Third, Bradley thought it was important to “maintain the illusion of the fact that the U.S. Army cannot be beaten.” or stopped from taking the Brittany ports.<sup>49</sup>

*“A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan next week.”*

*Gen George S. Patton*

### **The Turn East**

“On August 4, Montgomery issued a full-scale directive formally setting the course”<sup>50</sup> of action for the Allies as the normal next step after Cobra. Identifying the breakout as the

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<sup>46</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, “G-2 Ops Reports,” p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 160-1.

<sup>48</sup> In The Battle of the Generals, page 161, Blumenson points out that he is unable to identify who made the decision to clear Brittany.

<sup>49</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General’s Life, p. 285-6 and 305.

<sup>50</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 165.

disintegration of the enemy, he envisioned their next step would be to pull back to the Seine. This would enable the Allies to obtain the area west of the Seine. This area had already been identified by the long range planners as the area required to be in the hands of the Allies for the final push of the Germans out of France. Due to intelligence reports, Montgomery's plan would take advantage of the lack of bridges over the Seine by pinning the remaining enemy armies west of the river.

In accordance with the intent of the plan, Montgomery pushed Crerar's 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army for the capture of Falaise, then east towards the Seine. Dempsey's Second British Army would push southeast to Argentan and then also head east towards the Seine. "As for Bradley's 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group, Montgomery left the details to Bradley. He ordered simply a thrust to the east and northeast to Paris."<sup>51</sup>

Taking full advantage of the mobile US army, Bradley pushed his new established group to the east of Avranches to crush the Germans. But there wasn't any pushing required now. Patton was in the war.

### **Mortain counterattack**

"Some time on 2 August Hitler telephoned to [Field Marshall Gunther] von Kluge, [Commander in Chief, West,] an order to replace armour by infantry in the line and to assemble at least four Panzer divisions for a heavy blow westwards to the coast at Avranches."<sup>52</sup> Hitler's plan would solve many problems. First it would reestablish his left flank by cutting off the Allies at Avranches and second he would sever the Allied army south of Avranches from its logistic line.

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<sup>51</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 168.

<sup>52</sup> Ralph Bennett, Ultra in the West. The Normandy Campaign 1944-45, (Charles Scribner's Sons, NY, 1980), p. 111.

On the night of 6 August, “Ultra provided a brief warning to Bradley’s headquarters of the Mortain counter-attack, the Americans perfectly understood this as an opportunity, not a threat”<sup>53</sup> Bradley had two decisions. The first would be to recall the Third Army to strengthen Hodges First Army at Mortain and the second option would be to send the Third Army into the flank of the German counter-attack.<sup>54</sup> Confidently reminded by Eisenhower that “airlift could provide 2,000 tons of supplies daily” for the Third Army if this plan could not hold off the German counterattack; Bradley decided this “was an acceptable risk”<sup>55</sup> and turned the Third Army north in a pincer movement. “Hitler had exposed his whole broad flank to attack and encirclement from the south.”<sup>56</sup>

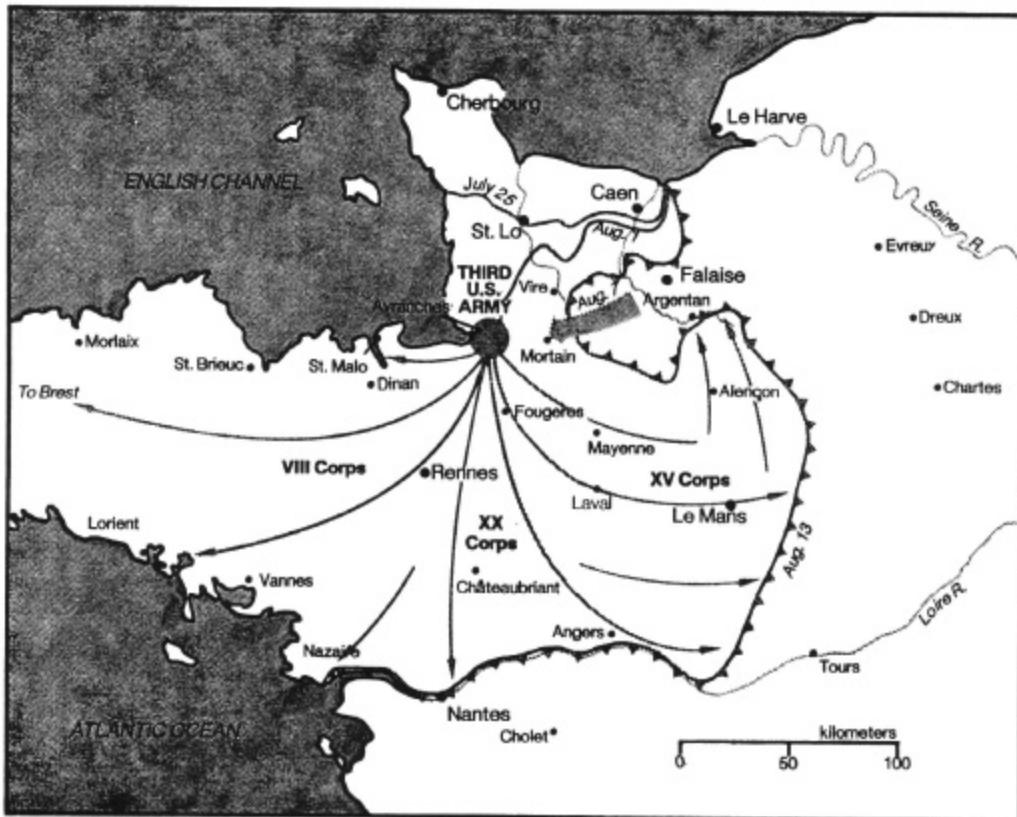
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<sup>53</sup> Hastings, Overlord D-Day and the Battle for Normandy, p. 283.

<sup>54</sup> David Eisenhower, Eisenhower At War 1943-1945, (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 392. David Eisenhower’s book suggests conflicting information on the German counterattack. On page 392 the counterattack information was received on 3 August. Additionally, David Irving’s The War Between The Generals, page 238, identifies General Eisenhower as creating the plan of encirclement.

<sup>55</sup> Eisenhower, p. 392.

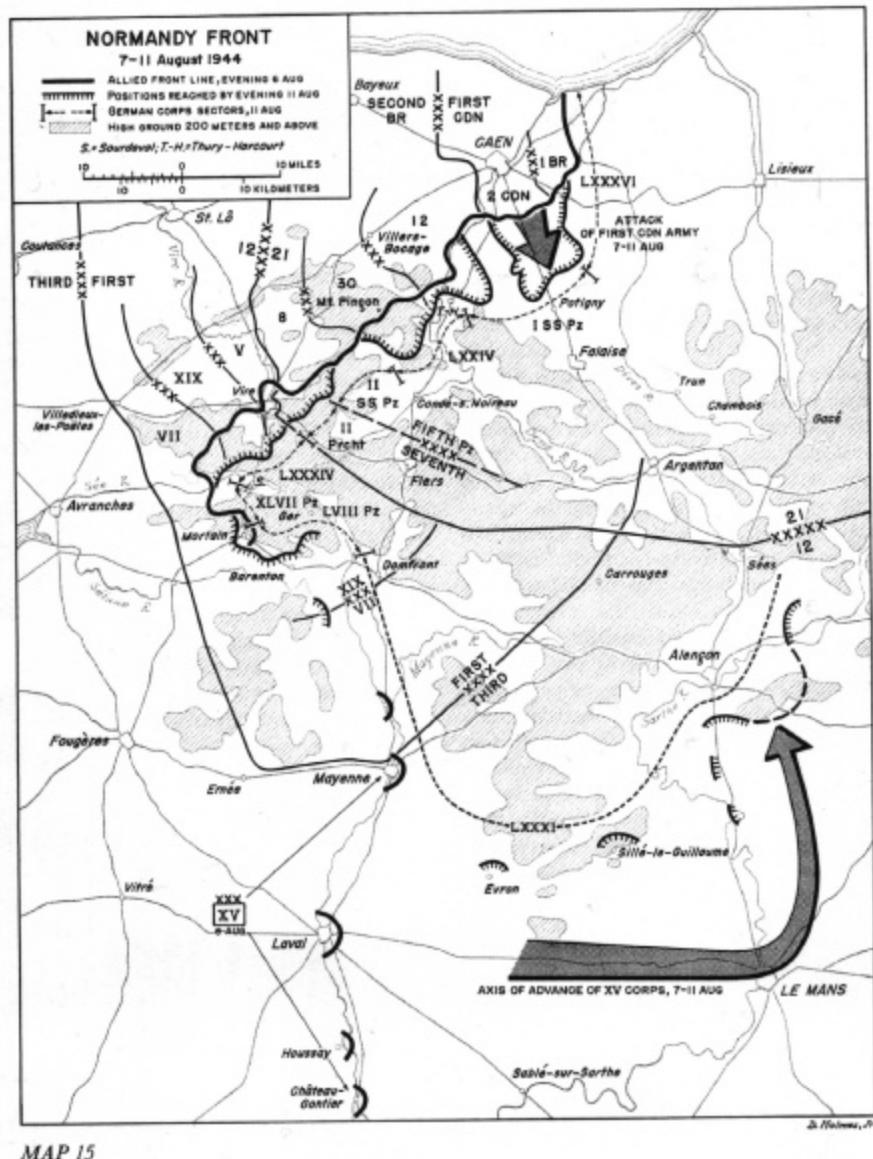
<sup>56</sup> Bradley, A Soldier’s Story, p. 372.



The Great Allied Trap Takes Shape

During the second night of the attack, Bradley told Henry Morgenthau, "This is an opportunity that comes to a commander not more than once in a century. We're about to destroy an entire hostile army."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, p. 375. Henry Morgenthau, US Secretary of Treasury, was visiting on a routine tour of the Theatre.



### MAP 15

“On August 8, with Eisenhower at Bradley’s headquarters in the morning, Bradley discussed with him the opportunity offered by the Mortain counterattack. Bradley preferred and suggested the simplest act, turning Haislip north from Le Mans. Instead of heading to the Seine to start a grand envelopment, Bradley proposed, as Russell Weigley has said, “a shallower and surer movement” aimed at the Germans around Mortain. The drive would complement the

Canadians thrust to the south. If the Canadians reached Falaise and continued on to Argentan, their meeting would trap an estimated twenty-one German divisions west of the town.”<sup>58</sup>

Recognizing the deadliness of the Allied air forces, a German 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Operations Officer said, “Bad weather is what we need, then everything will work out alright.”<sup>59</sup> But things would not work out for the German attacks. “As the early morning mist lifted, out of the sky came the first aircraft of the greatest concentration of fighter-bombers yet deployed in the west, Quesada’s Thunderbolts supported by the RAF’s rocket-firing Typhoons.” From “8-14 August, IX TAC flew 4012 sorties in the battle area. Air-ground cooperation missions of IX TAC reached their zenith beginning on 8 Aug.”<sup>60</sup>

“As late as 8 or 9 August, von Kluge could readily have executed the only sane movement open to him, a withdrawal to the Seine covered by a sacrificial rearguard. Hitler, and Hitler alone, closed this option to him and presented the Allies with their extraordinary opportunity. The climate within the German high command plumbed new depths of fantasy and grotesque comedy.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 190.

<sup>59</sup> Hastings, p. 285.

<sup>60</sup> Kenn C. Rust, The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force in World War II, (Fallbrook, CA: Aero Publisher, Inc., 1967), p. 102.

<sup>61</sup> Hastings, p. 288.

*“The dread of losses will always ensure failure, while we can assume with certainty that those troops who are not afraid of losses are bound to maintain an enormous superiority over others who are more sparing of blood.” Friedrich von Bernhardi, On War Today (Makers of Modern Strategy, p. 510)*

## **The Stop Order**

“[Major] General [Wade H.] Haislip’s XV Corps had taken le Mans on 8 August... and soon afterwards it was ready to drive north.”<sup>62</sup> But Patton was concerned about Haislip’s left flank and asked Bradley for two infantry divisions from Hodges for security. Additionally, he argued that they would “strengthen the encirclement.”<sup>63</sup> Bradley, more concerned with the attack still under way at Mortain, denied Patton his request.

By the night of 11 August, Hitler had approved Kluge’s request to make “a minor withdrawal” from Mortain to defend Alencon.<sup>64</sup> But Hitler’s information was rapidly becoming old. Haislip’s forces had already reached Alencon and come into contact with the 9<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division. “Allied planes and tanks” had reduced the Panzer Division to the point where “it consisted of only a battalion of infantry, a battalion of artillery, and perhaps a dozen of tanks.”<sup>65</sup>

As the Germans repeatedly tried to regain the initiative, von Kluge was continually denied the chance by the First Army movement. “Not only was the American advance upsetting German offensive plans, it had already deprived the *Seventh Army* of its supply base, thereby

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<sup>62</sup> Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 497.

<sup>63</sup> Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals*, p. 202.

<sup>64</sup> Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals*, p. 202.

<sup>65</sup> Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 501.

making [General Paul] Hausser's [2 SS Panzer Corps] forces entirely dependent for logistical support on the *Fifth Panzer Army*.<sup>66</sup>

On 12 August, reporting back to Patton, Haislip identified that he was about to reach his objectives of capturing Argentan and that he was ready to move on to meet the Canadians. "Consequently, at 10:17 P.M., August 12, Patton authorized continued advance."<sup>67</sup> He was told to "push on slowly in the direction of Falaise."<sup>68</sup>

Looking to pass on the news of getting closer to reaching Bradley's planned objective of closing the pocket, Patton called Bradley to let him know "We now have elements in Argentan. Shall we continue and drive the British into the sea for another Dunkirk?"<sup>69</sup> Bradley stopped any movement north and instructed Patton not to go beyond Argentan. "As a dumbfounded Patton listened, Bradley spoke of the need to avoid collision between Americans and Canadians"...potentially "prompting accidental gunfire against each other." Additionally, he informed Patton that he needed to "build up on that shoulder"<sup>70</sup> since he was expecting the Germans to begin pulling out soon.

The evening of 13 August Patton recorded in his diary that he "could easily advance to Falaise and completely close the [Argentan-Falaise] gap [and encircle the Germans.]" Three days later, he was entering more of his thoughts into the diary. He believed that the halt order had originated from Montgomery's command due to the "jealousy of the Americans or to the utter ignorance of the situation or to a combination of the two." He continued to believe that he could have positively closed the gap with the Canadians. While waiting for the closing of the

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<sup>66</sup> Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, p. 503.

<sup>67</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 206.

<sup>68</sup> Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, p. 504.

<sup>69</sup> Hansen Diary, 12 August 1944, USMHI. Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 376.

<sup>70</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 207.

gap to occur from the north, Patton watched as the Germans built up the shoulders of the gap while troops and equipment escaped.<sup>71</sup>

### Sorties in the pocket

Meanwhile the Allied air forces were taking advantage of a target rich environment. Additionally, the air forces would find the Germans' vehicles ripe for the picking without any protection from the skies. "Since the night of August 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> Army Group B had ordered the withdrawal of all anti-aircraft artillery from the pocket, while the *Luftwaffe* simply could not find the aircraft to contest control of the skies above it with the Allies, the broken and intermingled divisions on its floor had no means with which to defend themselves against aerial attack and no hope for survival but to press ever more urgently towards Trun and Chambois."<sup>72</sup> One "3-squadron mission by the 36<sup>th</sup> [Fighter Group] in the Argentan area came upon 800 to 1,000 vehicles standing on the roads. The group strafed and reported the destruction of 400 to 500 while another squadron in a later mission in the same area destroyed 50."<sup>73</sup>

On another occasion, as fighters flew over the pocket as armed reconnaissance aircraft, the XIX [Tactical Air Command] strafed trucks until noticing a white flag. After stooping and taking a better look, a column of several hundred vehicles had surrendered to XIX TAC until a ground unit was informed of the situation to collect them. On the 17<sup>th</sup>...the escape corridor to the Falaise pocket remained open – a fighter pilot reported, "the whole goddamn German Army was moving through this gap." "On the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, ...to hamper a growing German retreat effort seventeen IX TAC formations hit a multitude of targets over the Seine river. Some 58 barges, one lock and a pontoon bridge were destroyed on the 18<sup>th</sup>."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Blumenson, *The Battle of the Generals*, p. 210-1.

<sup>72</sup> John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 273.

<sup>73</sup> Rust, *The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force in World War II*, p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> Rust, *The 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force in World War II*, p. 106.

On several occasions the Allied fighter-bombers over the pocket were almost competing for airspace. On one particular case the XIX TAC discovered a large enemy troop movement. After checking the location of the troops they quickly discovered that the enemy troops were in the Royal Air Force's area of responsibility of which the RAF were only too happy to take over the attacks. The RAF's 2<sup>nd</sup> TAF used every fighter available to attack a reported two miles of vehicles, estimated at over 7,000, jammed 'bumper-to-bumper'. The total number of enemy destroyed or damaged was calculated as follows: 1159 MT destroyed, 1724 MT damaged, 124 tanks destroyed, 96 damaged tanks. To the 1500 RAF sorties, 25 aircraft were lost.<sup>75</sup>

## Analysis

### Developing the Lower Jaw

I will attempt to provide my own and other historians analyses of command decisions, communication breakdowns, and other failures during this campaign that are relevant to the gap not being closed sooner.

William Breuer's writes in The Death of a Nazi Army "in the morning of August 13, General Omar Bradley...received word that Patton had disregarded his stern instructions and had sent Wade Haislip's patrols on past the stop-line at Argentan."<sup>76</sup> He continues to write that the patrols went 8 miles north of Argentan to within 6 miles of Falaise. Another source identifies that for sometime in the early morning of 13 August, Patton's headquarters records are silent with no recordings.<sup>77</sup> Regardless of how the events occurred, most sources agree that Haislip's patrols were called back to Argentan.

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<sup>75</sup> United States Air Force Historical Support Office, Bolling AFB, *Twelve Thousand Fighter-Bomber Sorties: XIX Tactical Air Command's First Month of Operations in Support of Third US Army in France*, p. 24.

<sup>76</sup> William B. Breuer, The Death of a Nazi Army, (Briarcliff, NY: Scarborough House, 1985), p. 250.

<sup>77</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 208.

It seems Bradley's fears of the trapped German armies trying to escape originated from his intelligence officer Brigadier General Edwin L. Sibert. In actuality, "the remnants of *Seventh* and *Fifth Panzer* armies, numbering some one hundred thousand men, were milling about in confusion and in most cases heading eastward on their own without direction or orders from higher headquarters."<sup>78</sup>

Patton, stewing in his headquarters after getting the stop order from Bradley, called two hours later to ask Bradley to reconsider. General Leven Allen, Bradley's chief of staff, took the phone call since Bradley had gone to visit Eisenhower. While Allen attempted to contact Bradley, Brigadier General A. Franklin Kibler, Bradley's operations officer, put a call into Montgomery. Kibler contacted Major General Francis deGuingand, Montgomery's chief of staff, and asked for permission for Patton to push north. Answering for Montgomery, deGuingand gave a negative reply.<sup>79</sup>

"DeGuingand was later to admit: It is just possible that the gap might have been closed a little earlier if no restrictions had been imposed upon the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group Commander as to the limit of his northward movement."<sup>80</sup> Bradley described DeGuingand as a British Army planner who had no peer. He also stated that DeGuingand's brilliance "would pull Monty's fat out of the fire more than once" during the war.<sup>81</sup>

Although Rohmer's book concludes like a great mystery novel solved with Montgomery as the butler holding the smoking gun, his information does deserve some credit. He suggests, "Monty missed closing the sack" because, "He was fundamentally more interested in full

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<sup>78</sup> Breuer, The Death of a Nazi Army, p. 250.

<sup>79</sup> Breuer, The Death of a Nazi Army, p. 251.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Rohmer, Patton's Gap, (New York: Beaufort Books, Inc., 1981), p. 225.

<sup>81</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General's Life, p. 121.

envelopment than this inner envelopment.”<sup>82</sup> This lack of decision between two separate concepts of encirclement is valid and will be discussed again. Additionally, his failure to move the boundary line, separating the two army’s areas of operations, caused Bradley to stop and recall the movement of Patton’s forces north.

In A Soldier’s Story, Bradley identifies that “Monty shifted his main effort against the pocket farther west. Rather than close the trap by capping the leak at Falaise, Monty proceeded to squeeze the enemy out toward the Seine. If Monty’s tactics mystified me, they dismayed Eisenhower even more.”<sup>83</sup>

So, if we are to believe that Bradley’s order to stop originated from Montgomery and possibly because of the army boundary line, then why does Bradley discuss that Eisenhower was dismayed with Montgomery’s tactics? This, I would suggest, puts the spotlight on Eisenhower. Why didn’t Eisenhower get involved in the decision process? Eisenhower, supposedly was still awaiting the movement of the Headquarters from the United Kingdom, but was already fully aware of the current situation. And some historical documents suggest that he was standing beside Bradley when Patton’s forces were halted. If this were true, then it’s also possible he could have also been influenced by Sibert’s reports of the German army disengaging the counterattack at Mortain and moving eastward to exit the gap. But Ultra messages indicate otherwise.

“[Ultra] intercepted orders issued by von Kluge...which called for a renewal of the attack ‘probably on the 11<sup>th</sup>’, although there might be a postponement. [Later it was confirmed], Von Kluge had allowed himself to be over-ruled by Hitler. For the next twenty-four hours at least there would be no retreat; Bradley would have almost as much time as he needed, and the Allies

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<sup>82</sup> Rohmer, Patton’s Gap, p. 226-7.

<sup>83</sup> Bradley, A Soldier’s Story, p. 377.

could proceed in the confident expectation that if they acted quickly they would be able to surround most of the Germans troops in Northern France.”<sup>84</sup>

It is important to note that “These were some of Ultra’s most prolific days of the whole war; unprecedented amounts of Engima traffic were being intercepted, and most of it was decoded with such rapidity that signal after signal could be prepared so close to the Germans time of origin that each seemed more urgent than the last and the mind could scarcely hold on to a myriad details long enough to comprehend the relation of one to another. Unexpected quantity brought no decline in quality, but was so great that for the period of the Falaise pocket a mere selection...[would] serve to show how Ultra depicted the confusion as a swift and terrible fate overtook Hitler’s armies in Normandy.”<sup>85</sup>

In A General’s Life, Bradley pointed out another problem that might have engrossed Montgomery’s time. Not long after Bradley had given the ‘stop order’ to Patton’s forces, Eisenhower and Bradley met with Montgomery to discuss “the strategic and tactical situation. Monty chose this occasion to unveil a grandiose strategic plan to carry the war beyond Normandy and the Seine. It was a radical departure from the plans... drawn in England before D-day and (as in Sicily) it subordinated U.S. forces to Monty’s to an absurd and unacceptable degree. With our forces poised to close the trap at Falaise-Argentan and Monty’s forces falling down on the job, Monty could not have chosen a more inappropriate time to unveil his strategic plan.”<sup>86</sup>

Bradley also brings light on some of the political strain on the Allied coalition leadership. Falaise, he identifies, “was a long-sought British objective and, for them, a matter of immense prestige. If Patton’s patrols grabbed Falaise, it would be an arrogant slap in the face at a time

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<sup>84</sup> Bennett, Ultra in the West. The Normandy Campaign 1944-45, p. 118.

<sup>85</sup> Bennett, Ultra in the West. The Normandy Campaign 1944-45, p. 119-20.

when we clearly needed to build confidence in the Canadian Army.” In another comment, Bradley suggests “it would not have been politic for either Ike, who had not yet formally taken command of ground forces, or me to attempt to make radically new suggestions about the deployment of his forces.”<sup>87</sup>

By 13 August, regardless of what Ultra was reporting, Eisenhower, Bradley, and Montgomery had received “extensive intelligence briefings” which conveyed that the enemy was escaping and that many had already escaped. Bradley described the news as a “shattering disappointment—one of my greatest of the war. A golden opportunity had truly been lost. I boiled inside, blaming Monty for the blunder. We had done our part, set the lower haws at Argentan and restrained Patton from a brash and foolish overextension. Monty, perhaps too busy with his strategic plans, had turned his part over to the Canadians, an unproven army depending to a great extent on two armored divisions, one Canadian, one Polish, both new to combat.”<sup>88</sup>

Montgomery, after the failure of Operation TOTALIZE, issued new orders to the First Canadian Army to quickly capture Falaise. These new orders became Operation TRACTABLE. But TRACTABLE was the same operation as TOTALIZE, using strategic bombers to knock out defensive positions, except using smoke, instead of night, to impair the visibility on the battlefield. Unfortunately, some already “considered “Totalize” an example of “inflexible, time wasting method,” whereby staff planning and preparation “succeeded in burying the enemy under several thousand tons of explosives.” “[Speed], the most powerful weapon of Armoured Warfare,” [never appeared] to have been a paramount concern.”<sup>89</sup> Both times the Canadians were denied their objectives.

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<sup>86</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General’s Life, p. 299.

<sup>87</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General’s Life, p. 298-301.

<sup>88</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General’s Life, p. 299.

<sup>89</sup> English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, p. 290-3.

In A Soldier's Story, Bradley continues to argue that he doubted the ability of Patton's four divisions to hold the "Nineteen German divisions now stampeding to escape the trap." He also continued by saying that he "was reluctant to chance a head-on meeting between two converging Armies as we might have done had Patton continued on to Falaise."<sup>90</sup> I believe there are holes in these arguments.

First, if Bradley's forces at Mortain could repel the counterattack, why couldn't Patton's forces have done the same thing to the East? Remarks discussing the Mortain attack in the First Army After Action Report noted the "thrust was blunted and stopped by the 30<sup>th</sup> Division aided by a regiment from the 4<sup>th</sup> Division."<sup>91</sup> Recognizing that these two elements didn't make up the entire fighting force to halt the counter attack at Mortain, I believe Patton's forces should have been able to repel the attack to escape. Moreover, with the union of Allied ground forces, after closing the gap, the Allied forces to the north should have been available to flow into the vacuum. Additionally, another source of reserves available to Bradley were the "paratroopers and glidermen of the newly formed Allied First Airborne Army." "General Bradley wanted the glider and parachute outfits [the U.S. 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne divisions] to be held in readiness in the event he would want them to close the Argentan-Falaise gap."<sup>92</sup> Secondly, "Bradley knew full well that the Panzers and infantry were holding the Canadians and Poles in check well north of Falaise. There could be no possible danger of their colliding head on so long as the German forces stood between them."<sup>93</sup> So why did the Allied leadership spoil the momentum of the southern forces driving north and instead choosing the northern forces that were stagnate?

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<sup>90</sup> Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 377.

<sup>91</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, "G-2 Ops Reports," p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> Breuer, The Death of a Nazi Army, p. 252-3.

<sup>93</sup> Rohmer, Patton's Gap, p. 220.

Another influence that has already been discussed is the intelligence effort. It seems that Bradley's intelligence staff was not considering the enemies attrition in the pocket. During the Mortain attack, the First Army After Action Report identified the enemy was "repulsed with considerable loss to him in tanks and vehicles" and that a concentration of tanks for a probable follow-on attack "did not materialize" due to a directed effort of Allied fighter-bombers.<sup>94</sup> Though impossible to determine the strength of enemy units, it would seem that the Allied successful reports of contact from ground and air forces on the enemy were not being considered. Captain Chester B. Hansen, Aide to General Bradley, wrote in his diary on 12 August 1944, "Today air had a field day, ranging up and down the German pocket destroying motor transport, prohibiting movement while heavy guns from the south interdicted roads and bridges. If the German does pull back, he will of necessity sacrifice virtually all of his armor and a good proportion of his transport, retrieving only foot personnel who are able to make the long march to the Seine and swim or boat themselves across. Our great air superiority in air and artillery has confounded the German and he is dazed by the continual shelling that prisoners admit "keep them in the fox holes all day and all night."<sup>95</sup> The First Army intelligence staff admitted that their "approach [was] hardly the place to catalogue claims of conquest."<sup>96</sup>

Bradley also states, "In halting Patton at Argentan, however, I did not consult with Montgomery. The decision to stop Patton was mine alone; it never went beyond my CP."<sup>97</sup> Why didn't Bradley communicate halting action to Montgomery? The boundary lines between the two armies were crossed causing Patton to retrieve Haislip's patrol. But wouldn't Bradley's headquarters have reported to Montgomery where they were located? Until Eisenhower actually

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<sup>94</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, "G-2 Ops Reports," p. 38.

<sup>95</sup> *Hansen Diary*, 12 August 1944, USMHI.

<sup>96</sup> NARA, RG 94 Box 2017, US First Army, "G-2 Ops Reports," p. 32.

<sup>97</sup> Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p.377.

took command of the ground forces in France, Montgomery was still the Field Marshal of the land forces in this theater. Even though sources state that Eisenhower was with Bradley during the stop decision at Argentan, Montgomery should have been notified. Eisenhower should pick up some criticism for potentially ‘muddying’ the water of the command structure. The result could be considered an ineffective chain of command reducing Montgomery’s role as ground commander or at least cause problems coordinating the Allied ground effort towards the same objective.

By early August Eisenhower “had established an advanced SHAEF headquarters in France.” Although he hadn’t assumed command of the ground forces yet, Bradley suggests that he was “ever-present”. Bradley also admitted he would make “no major move without consulting” Eisenhower.<sup>98</sup>

Many sources go into great detail to build an image about the personalities and conflicts between Eisenhower and Montgomery. The short version is Montgomery is described to have been a frustrated General for not being Supreme Commander and instead, having to work for Eisenhower. Montgomery had already “concluded that the Americans were hopelessly trained and led, made poor soldiers, and were unlikely to improve quickly in either performance or leadership.”<sup>99</sup> Additionally, many sources state that Montgomery was totally envious of the COBRA breakthrough and media coverage from the rapid expanse of Bradley’s forces through France. These cases are usually strong enough to make us believe that his feelings might have affected his professional judgment and, therefore, didn’t allow Patton’s forces to move north so the British Army Group could close the gap.

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<sup>98</sup> Bradley and Blair, A General’s Life, p. 297.

<sup>99</sup> Weinberg, A World at Arms, p. 444.

Air Marshall Sir Arthur Coningham, Montgomery's Tactical Air Force commander, also voiced a similar view some years later. He thought Montgomery's feeling was that he wanted to be able to do it himself and "that the British strength was ebbing in comparison with the American."<sup>100</sup> Coningham continued to say that he thought Montgomery should have admitted that he couldn't get the job done and let the Americans close the pocket.

On more than one occasion, Montgomery wrote to Field Marshal Alan Brooke, describing how the breakthrough in the west had been his plan all the time. Quoting quite a few letters or messages, authors have illustrated how Montgomery's exaggerations or premature announcements of meeting certain goals or objectives in the east beachhead front turned out not to have happened or were never achieved. Other times, Montgomery announced that he was more than happy with his achievements, when many leaders, to include the British ones, were not so impressed. Both Air Marshals Sir Arthur W. Tedder, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, and Sir Arthur Coningham thought the Falaise gap was one of Monty's greatest errors.<sup>101</sup>

Another argument, or controversy, was the indecision that existed about a long envelopment or the short hook. Patton had argued for the long envelopment during the initial planning stages. Patton suggested that if they were to encircle the army then why not circle the enemy all the way to the Seine River. The Seine River would provide a natural protection for Patton's eastern flank while creating a large pocket to surround more of the German army. This plan was continually denied in Bradley's headquarters, even though Patton had mentioned it several more times to Bradley during the development of the pocket.

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<sup>100</sup> *Oral Interview with Air Marshall Sir Arthur Coningham*, USMHI.

<sup>101</sup> *Oral Interview with Air Marshall Sir Arthur Coningham* and *Oral Interview with Lord Tedder*, USMHI.

Montgomery seemed to have developed a similar opinion. On 10 August at 11 PM, Montgomery wrote Brooke about his plans to send the Canadians to take Falaise then turn to take Trun, a small town about ten miles east-southeast of Falaise. Blumenson identifies this as the first time Montgomery mentioned the plan. Furthermore he never brought it up with Bradley. “Had he done so, as he should have out of respect for coalition courtesy and the chain of command, Bradley, knowing what Montgomery had in mind, would have been able to plan his troop dispositions more effectively.”<sup>102</sup>

Weinberg, too, suggests Montgomery’s coordination was a little thin. “If Bradley had ordered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to drive beyond its designated advance line to Falaise, the pocket could have been sealed off earlier and more effectively; but in the absence of regular meetings between Montgomery and the American commanders (because of Montgomery’s unwillingness to have such meetings), such a step would have been difficult to take.”<sup>103</sup> In an effort to maintain operational control, Montgomery wrote to Brooke explaining one possible reason the meetings might have been hampered. “Ike is actually here in Normandy, which is too bad. His ignorance of everything about war is total. He is so amiable that it is difficult to be irritated with him. But I am firm on one point: never will I permit him to be at a conference between me, my army commanders, and Bradley.”<sup>104</sup> Perhaps this gives reason to why Eisenhower visited Bradley often.

On the discussion of the long envelopment, Blumenson quotes Weigley. “As Russell Weigley has said, Montgomery reminded his subordinate commanders to return to the Seine River envelopment if the jaws at Falaise and Argentan failed to close the trap or to close it rapidly enough.” By presenting multiple options and essentially removing a clear commanders

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<sup>102</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 200.

<sup>103</sup> Weinberg, A World at Arms, p. 694.

intent statement, his subordinates probably walked away from the meeting with a general acceptance that a closing of the gap may not be possible and this was already acceptable to their boss. “By waffling, by expecting failure in the shallow encirclement, Montgomery virtually assured that result.”<sup>105</sup>

Bradley “had concluded several days before that [he] could not close the Falaise gap without endangering [his] Argentan shoulder.” In his mind, this left him with three choices. First, hold the current position until the pocket closed. Second, “lighten [the] force on the shoulder, drive 10 miles northeast to Chambois, and there block one more enemy exit route.” Third, “leave a part [the] force at Argentan to await a juncture with Montgomery’s pincer and race east with the remainder to grab a bridgehead across the Seine.” The decision was settled on 14 August when Patton suggested four of Haislip’s divisions be cut loose to speed on to the Seine. Bradley chose the third option thinking to himself, “If Montgomery wants help closing the gap...then let him ask us for it.”<sup>106</sup>

The next discussion with Monty occurred immediately after Haislip had started his push towards the Seine. Monty called to propose that the southern pincer proceed northeast to Chambois and let Bradley know that he had already started the Poles in a movement with this new objective in mind. Bradley informed Monty that he had just sent two divisions northeast towards the Seine. Noting that Monty was not pleased, Bradley started to second-guess himself. Bradley writes that he is still not certain about the decision not to postpone the push towards the Seine in place of going on to Chambois suggesting, “Chambois would have yielded more prisoners.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 219.

<sup>105</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 203.

<sup>106</sup> Bradley, A Soldier’s Story, p. 378.

<sup>107</sup> Bradley, A Soldier’s Story, p. 379.

In Keegan's book he also came to a similar conclusion stating, "Later [Bradley] would claim that he doubted the ability of four divisions to hold a gap through which nineteen German divisions, weak in men and material but strong with the desperation of the trapped, were struggling to escape. Events would subsequently prove that doubt plausible. But when the doubt took him the Germans were not flooding eastward, but waiting immobile inside the pocket for some word which would release them from their agony. Word did not arrive until forty-eight hours after he had sent half of Patton's Army towards Chartres and Orleans."<sup>108</sup>

### **The Northern Pincer**

As the decision was made to turn the XV Corps north towards Alencon, Montgomery was confident the Canadians could make Argentan to close the gap. On the night of 7 August, Crerar launched Operation TOTALIZE towards Falaise. Initially the attacks enjoyed success, but exploitation failed due to the lack of experience. By the 9<sup>th</sup> of August the Canadians were at the half waypoint to Falaise but were stopped by heavy German resistance. "Montgomery had an opportunity to influence the course of TOTALIZE by reinforcing Crerar with units from the Second Army, which was progressing through the bocage with relative ease in a series of secondary attacks."<sup>109</sup>

Montgomery's decision to continue to press attacks from the north stemmed from his belief that the Germans would bring units from the east or from within the pocket to hold the southern movement at Alencon. He assumed the defense of Alencon would be stronger and that the Canadians movement would be much easier.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Keegan, Six Armies in Normandy, p. 261.

<sup>109</sup> D'Este, Decision in Normandy, p. 426.

<sup>110</sup> D'Este, Decision in Normandy, p. 427-8

“Unfortunately, Montgomery’s assessment was quite wrong and the reason stems at least in part, from the repeated failure of the British commanders to perceive the ability of the US Army to move rapidly and decisively under conditions of mobile warfare.”<sup>111</sup>

But as much as his stereotype didn’t hold true for the Americans he didn’t seem to remember the difficulties of leading the Canadians he had recently trained. “Montgomery knew the Canadians very well and was aware of their strengths and weaknesses. He had trained them in England, brought them up militarily, put them on the right track. Yet his inability to judge what they were capable of as they struck repeatedly toward Falaise prevented him from reinforcing Crerar and Simonds.”<sup>112</sup> Weinberg too faults Montgomery for failing to close the pocket by writing, “[he] sent untried Canadian divisions and the Polish armored division instead of more experienced units close to the gap.”<sup>113</sup>

Montgomery’s opinion of the Canadian leadership has been documented in many sources. Montgomery complained in a letter to Brooke on 26 July 1944. “[Crerar] took over command at 1200 hrs 23 July. He made his first mistake at 1205 hrs; and his second after lunch.”<sup>114</sup>

John English’s book brings to light many of these problems and “places the ultimate responsibility for the operational shortcomings revealed in Normandy on the Canadian high command.” He explains that this is due to the “lean interwar years, Canadian senior commanders, overly concerned with keeping the essence of their profession and forgot the lessons of 1914-1918.”<sup>115</sup> He also pointed out that “Crerar had practically no experience in field

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<sup>111</sup> D’Este, Decision in Normandy, p. 428.

<sup>112</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 269.

<sup>113</sup> Weinberg, A World at Arms, p. 694.

<sup>114</sup> English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, p. 194.

<sup>115</sup> English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, p. xi.

command.”<sup>116</sup> Montgomery had seen this inadequacy and thought “the collective training of the Canadian Corps revealed “1<sup>st</sup> class” troops, but a high command seriously wanting.” “In Montgomery’s judgment, the “weak point of the Canadian Corps” was the lack of “knowledge of commanders in the stage-management of battle operations, and in the technique of battle fighting generally, on their own level.”<sup>117</sup>

“Even Major-General Harry Foster [7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Commander] agreed that Canadians were no match for the Germans once they were dug in.” He continued by saying that “we held the advantage; in the air, at sea, and on the ground. Yet every time our troops got beyond the range of supporting artillery or sour weather grounded our fighter-bomber cover, the Germans stopped us cold.”<sup>118</sup>

“Both armored divisions, Canadian and Polish, entering combat on August 8, committed the mistakes normal to inexperienced and unblooded units.” Montgomery had used green troops for his push to Falaise and this decision cost the Allies more than lives, it was the single most important reason why any chance of closing the pocket from the north failed. “Despite superiority in the air and artillery, the five divisions and the two armored brigades numbering a total of 600 tanks were unable to handle two depleted German divisions equipped with a total of 60 tanks and tank destroyers.”<sup>119</sup>

### **Bomb line removed from the pocket**

“With the failure of the German thrust toward the coast and with the Falaise-Argentan pocket taking shape, air’s mission of close support again became pre-eminent. It also became increasingly difficult to accomplish. The fronts were for the most part fluid, and in the

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<sup>116</sup> English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, p. 127.

<sup>117</sup> English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, p. 132.

<sup>118</sup> English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> Blumenson, The Battle of the Generals, p. 185-6.

prevailing confusion bomb lines were constantly shifting. Since all were naturally concerned to avoid the bombing of friendly troops, the area in which close support missions could be carried out was steadily restricted.”<sup>120</sup> (Battle of Falaise Pocket attached)

On 15 August, Major General Carl A. Spaatz, Commander, U.S. Strategic Air Forces, Tedder, and Air Chief Marshal Arthur Harris, Bomber Command, all discussed the possibility of using heavy bombers in the Falaise pocket. This discussion was brought to Bradley’s attention for input. Bradley “took counsel with Ninth Air Force” who immediately advised against it due to the “practical certainty that American and British casualties in large numbers would result.” Therefore, fighter-bombers almost exclusively owned the pocket and gap. The concern of the Allied Air Force to avoid friendly ground attacks was evident. The preflight briefings prior to these sorties would always include the phrase, “Know your target before you hit it.”<sup>121</sup>

“On 17 August the bomb line was entirely removed from the pocket west of the narrowing Falaise-Argentan gap, and theoretically air activity over the beleaguered enemy in that area ceased.”<sup>122</sup> The removal of the bomb line was a good idea for several reasons. First, Operation COBRA had already defined the lack of communication and coordination that existed with the bomber force and the armies. Second, Operation COBRA was an attempt to cause a breakthrough on a relatively static frontline. The Falaise pocket environment, with the rapidly changing front lines, was very different than the breakout of Normandy. Therefore, neither the Falaise pocket nor the gap of the pocket would have provided the bombers with an enemy held area that could be assured not be in the hands of the Allied ground forces soon. Third, even with several days of planning and one false start, COBRA bombers had failed to prevent friendly casualties twice in a row for different reasons. Additionally, the accuracy demonstrated during

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<sup>120</sup> Craven and Cate, Vol III, p. 253-4.

<sup>121</sup> Craven and Cate, Vol III, p. 254.

Operation COBRA, and the war in general, proved heavy bombers were not suited for any kind of close targeting near friendly troops. Finally, after experiencing the results of Operation COBRA, Eisenhower was quoted that he would not allow heavy bombers to be used again for a tactical target while he was in charge.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Allies certainly demonstrated a capability to work together much better than the Axis powers, but their unity was far from perfect. Fortunately, England and the United States had a healthy political relationship capable of overcoming disagreements. But for England, the strength of the United States was a large pill to swallow. England certainly played a part in the learning process that the United States military force underwent during World War II; and the United States was learning to fight effectively at a rapid rate. The United States industrial productions were at their peak, producing an incredible amount of war materials as well as training military personnel. The industrial strength of the U.S. combined with the rapid production of a highly mobile army made the U.S. potent regardless of its lack of fighting experience. England, on the other hand, was struggling with personnel to handle the attrition of the war. This presented a problem for the leadership of the Allied ground forces. The U.S. and England had already decided that the U.S. would pick the Supreme Commander of the Allied forces and Eisenhower was designated. Eisenhower, either recognizing his inexperience in the operational level of war or recognizing his importance at the strategic level, or both, selected Montgomery to lead the ground forces for the invasion into France.

By 1 August Bradley had an Army Group with an equivalent amount of forces as Montgomery. This produced an unusual organization; with Bradley more like a peer to

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<sup>122</sup> Craven and Cate, Vol III, p. 253-4.

Montgomery than a subordinate. Additionally, Montgomery didn't seem to be taking to many risks with his forces, much less directing Bradley to do so.

By the time the closing of the gap had approached, due to the news back at home, Montgomery had become exacerbated of hearing about the incredible amount of landscape the American armies were chewing up while his troops in the North were stagnated. Along with not being able to launch a successful attack against the well dug-in Germans and dealing with the green troops of the Canadians and the Poles, Montgomery's frustration level should have been at its peak. In addition, Montgomery's personality, requiring a tidy operation, became a handicap when he failed to reinforce Operation TOTALIZE with more experienced British troops to exploit the ground that had been achieved. Moreover, Montgomery should have swallowed his pride and moved the Army Group boundary lines when asked by Bradley aides. Additionally, the coordination of closing the gap should have become his immediate priority. The information provided is apparent, that Montgomery was working on a strategic plan well into the future instead of concentrating on closing the gap or the performance of his Army group. Montgomery, recognizing the American strength of mobilized warfare, as well as the lack of German defense against the southern pincer movement, should have focused all his attention on closing the gap from the south. Instead, pride and being unwilling to assess the risk of the southern pincer movement prevented him from even considering closing the gap from the south.

Montgomery is not the only commander at fault. Bradley too could have been stronger at suggesting that the gap needed to be closed from the south. Instead, Bradley's lack of communication with his ground commander proved to be a large error. Bradley's order stopping Patton should have been immediately communicated to the ground force commander as soon as the boundary line had been reached. The two Army Group commanders could have examined

the intelligence information on the resistance that each army had been encountering and made a more informed decision on what the follow on order would be. Additionally, Bradley's decision to move forces from the shoulder at Argentan east towards the Seine denied any control that Montgomery might have had on sticking to the operation plan of the short envelopment.

Montgomery, too, demonstrated a failure to stick to one operational plan. Evidence, which has been presented, discusses a briefing in which Montgomery presents a back-up plan of changing direction if the resistance was to stiff indicating that he was stuck between the two decisions. Although the Ultra information is reported to be abundant, the intelligence used to make the key decisions seems to be inaccurate. The intelligence reports of a German rapid retreat caused Bradley to stop Patton's forces while only two days later different reports convince the Allied leaders that they have missed their opportunity to trap the enemy. Meanwhile the German's had yet to receive their orders allowing them to retreat.

In regard to air power, although it was extremely effective at enabling the armies to move faster and deal with patches of enemy forces, I don't believe that they could have been used more effectively to help close the pocket. While the coordination between the air and ground forces was at its peak, it was still very much in its infantile stage of development. Furthermore, the use of heavy bombers had been proven more than once to be disastrous to friendly ground forces. The technology and precision of the aircraft in 1944 was not made for close air support and didn't adapt easily to changing conditions in the front lines. The fighters did the best they could by targeting the extensive number of long convoys in the pocket once again making any mobility the Germans did have to be very difficult.

## **Doctrine, Command Structure, or Commander Personality**

Finally, while the Falaise pocket certainly resulted in a large loss of men and equipment for the *German Army*, I believe the Allied leadership failed to capitalize or exploit the mistake made by Hitler driving the *German Army* westward to cut off the Allied forces south of Avranches. By not closing the pocket's gap at Falaise or elsewhere sooner, the Allied forces lost an opportunity to destroy a large percentage of the enemy in France, therefore allowing them to regroup and fight again later in the war. This mistake of not closing the gap cannot be the result of the Army doctrine. General Bradley demonstrated during Operation COBRA that he was willing 'to think outside the box.' COBRA is proof that the leadership, during this phase of the war, was innovative. The major factor for this failure was commander personalities.

Commander personalities can overcome any obstacle. With the right personality, a poorly organized command structure only results in inefficiency that can bog down an operation. While this can be a major hurdle when leading large organizations to push towards a single objective, commander personalities can unite armies to form effective teams towards achieving a common objective. Commander personalities can overcome inefficiencies in a command structure. Additionally, a commander's personality must demand open communication lines up and down the chain of command. Subordinates must feel the ability to state their case without suffering the backlash of presenting a dissenting opinion. All these traits are even more important when dealing with coalitions due to the fact that national pride can become a large hurdle. In the case of the Falaise gap, Bradley needed a stronger personality with a political touch to push Montgomery into recognizing that moving the army group boundary north was the most professional course regardless of national pride. The movement of the boundary would have allowed Patton's forces to take advantage of the lack of enemy resistance in the south

relative to the northern enemy resistance. Where this might have caused the Canadians and British some discomfort in pride, the success of closing the pocket would have shadowed any hurt feelings.

Montgomery's personality must also be considered. If Montgomery truly disallowed himself to consider closing the pocket from the south, due to his national pride, then his egotistical personality proved to be a professional disadvantage to being commander of the Allied ground forces. Additionally, it's possible; Montgomery's focus on development of a strategic plan for the campaign caused him the inability to recognize the importance of closing the gap faster with Patton's forces instead of using the Canadians and the Poles. Moreover, Montgomery's personal trait of tidy operations denied him the process of exploiting the Canadian gains with more experienced British forces.

Finally, Eisenhower's personality demonstrated both advantages and disadvantages during the Falaise Gap. Eisenhower's personality, potentially lacking confidence in running a ground war, prevented him from seizing control of the Allied ground forces or at least using a stronger form of coercion to influence Montgomery's tactics that 'mystified' him. Yet, Eisenhower must be, and has been given, much credit for maintaining a united coalition considering both different types of personalities and the national pride that needed to be cajoled.

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